

Missing Perspectives

The Ministry of Jesus through the Women of the Church

A Greek-Word Study

My soul continues to magnify the utter beauty of God's Word as I write this study of key passages about women in the New Testament. I give credit to the New American Standard Bible (NASB) Greek Dictionary for helping me discover the meanings of these passages.

Introduction

(Gleaned from the book, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart)

Bible Translation

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew with a few spots of Aramaic in the books of Daniel and Ezra. The New Testament was written in Greek.

No original documents exist, but only thousands of copies called manuscripts. They were produced by hand and copied repeatedly for over 1,400 years for the New Testament, and longer for the Old Testament.

The thousands of early New Testament manuscripts are consistent and, therefore, can be trusted. However, later manuscripts began to show inconsistencies after being copied over and over, and biases being inserted. It is important therefore, to study Scripture using Bible translations that are based on the early manuscripts.

Most often, one English word cannot convey the full, rich meanings of Hebrew and Greek words. But, good news! – We don't have to become Hebrew or Greek scholars to understand their fuller meanings. We can easily learn from a good Hebrew/Greek dictionary in order to ponder their truth and be amazed and changed by their beauty!

Reason for Writing

I wrote this study because I believe it is needed for today's church. Gross mistranslations of key passages about women have strongly influenced the direction of the church for generations, which is astounding to me.

So, before I unpack four commonly misunderstood passages about women in the New Testament using the study tools I mentioned earlier, here are two verses to consider:

- Galatians 3:28 – "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
- 1 Peter 3:7b – "...show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life..."

There are obvious, beautiful differences between men and women. These differences were created by God for His purposes and our joy.

In Genesis 2:18, a woman is called an *ezer* (*pronounced ay-zer*), often translated as *helper*. Women are helpers, but the word means so much more. Women are helpers in the sense of “saving, rescuing and protecting.” The word *ezer* also connotes a *complement*, meaning someone who fills in the lack, who supports where support is needed. Men have particular abilities, and women have particular abilities, and they help each other. *Equality* and *oneness* are not *sameness*.

We must recognize and respect the differences between men and women. Some of the differences include how we think; our outward appearance; our physical ability; our emotions; and our appointed tasks that are fulfilled according to God’s endowment (i.e., a man cannot nurse a child). As we embrace the work God has given each of us and live it out in our relationships, we will find the greatest joy.

Examination of 4 Passages

Let’s examine four passages from the New Testament in the light of their cultural context and Greek definitions.

1. 1 Corinthians 14:34

- **The cultural context of Paul’s writing**

Pagan priestesses in nearby Delphi were engaged in evil practices that were infiltrating the new church at Corinth. These practices were *symbols* of their low morals – they shaved their heads, spoke incoherently, and purposed to lead men astray with their alluring attire and gestures.

Paul’s concern was that women who followed Messiah Jesus should never allow themselves to be influenced by these evil women or to be viewed in any way as resembling them in their practices. Therefore, so that a distinction could be made, Paul prohibited women to speak and dress in the ways that resembled these women.

(See Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible New American Standard Revised Edition ©2008 by AMG International, Inc., Page 1527)

- **1 Corinthians 14:33-38 as it appears in most translations**

³³ for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

³⁴ The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. ³⁵ If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶ Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?

³⁷ If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. ³⁸ But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

- **A Greek-word examination of 1 Corinthians 14:34**

Mistranslated words are crossed out, Greek words are in *blue italics*, and *green* words are truer to the Greek meaning:

Let the ~~women~~ (*gunaikes*) *wives* keep silent in the churches,

for they are not permitted to ~~speak~~ (*lalein*) *utter sounds that are incoherent or not understood by others, like the words that are spoken by the evil priestesses.*

- **Conclusions**

- *Women* in Verse 34 means *wives*, not *women* in general. If wives were making such a display of rebellion in the church, it was the husbands’ duty to stop them. In Scripture, a woman is only to be submissive to her godly husband. It was no one else’s place to subdue her.

- While the words spoken by some of the wives may have been true spiritual words, in Paul's view it was better for them to remain silent in order to avoid any confusion, disruption, or appearances of evil. The men were also told to remain silent unless there was an interpreter.
- In essence, Paul was instructing women to wear their hair and clothes in such a way that is morally proper for their gender and culture.

2. 1 Timothy 2:9

Paul said, "I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly." There is no English equivalent for the beautiful Greek word *Sōphrosunē* which we translate as *discreetly*. *Sōphrosunē* is the voluntary limitation of one's freedom of thought or behavior and sober-mindedness, the wisdom to constrain yourself in order to do what is appropriate and what will edify.

In the community of Messiah Jesus, women became free for the first time – equal to their husbands; however, each woman was to use her new freedom to limit her behavior to only what would edify the gathering. Her behavior and dress were to bless and not distract or lure. The same is true today.

3. 1 Timothy 2:11

- **The cultural context of Paul's writing**

While in Israel, as we stood inside the excavation site of a first-century Judean home, our tour guide taught us that Jewish women were greatly valued and highly honored in their calling of taking care of the children and governing the peace in their homes. At sundown on Shabbat, women were the ones who lit the candles in their home, setting the atmosphere for their family's holy day of rest.

The Jewish men attended not only to their work, but also participated in the local synagogue where they would learn from an appointed teacher or *rabbi* (a highly-respected teacher).

These beautiful roles that men and women performed made it necessary for the wives to learn from their husbands at home. The women were simply not available to be taught with the men, because they were about (what was considered to be) the more important task of raising children. (For my notes to single women, please see Page 6).

We know even today that when two people carry the load, more is accomplished.

- **A Greek word examination of 1 Timothy 2:11**

Mistranslated words are crossed out, Greek words are in *blue italics*, and *green* words are truer to the Greek meaning:

Let the ~~woman~~ (*gunē*) ~~wife~~ quietly receive instruction (*hēsuchia*) continuously learn in peaceable tranquility, not being disturbed in her positioning under ~~with entire submissiveness~~ (*hypotage-nupo*) to be placed in proper order.

Therefore, a proper translation of this verse is:

Let the wife continuously learn in peaceable tranquility, not being disturbed in her positioning under to be placed in proper order.

- **Conclusions**

- Wives were encouraged to be content (not disturbed) with their position of learning the teachings of the rabbis from their husbands, since they had other important tasks to perform. They were to recognize and embrace their glorious, beautiful, and valuable position in the community.

- Paul's encouragement to wives did not mean, as it is so often purported, that they were to remain totally quiet in the gatherings; rather, it meant they should be content to learn the rabbi's teaching from their husbands. A woman's rebellion against this structure would have been in opposition to the beauty of God's order, and would express ingratitude for the gift He had given her. Rebellion would also resemble the actions of the evil priestesses.
- Scripture simply does not teach that women have nothing of value to share with men or that men cannot benefit from a woman's spiritual gift of teaching. As the Holy Spirit comes through our spiritual gifts, everyone is edified.
- Today, women are taught *with* their husbands. We can, however, apply these verses to our current culture:
 - A married woman should not be mentored one-on-one by a man who is not her husband.
 - Before brashly disagreeing with her husband in public and possibly embarrassing him, a wife should discuss her concerns with him at home and pray to be unified.
 - Women should be careful not to be influenced by the immoral culture around them.
 - A married woman should respect and praise her husband "as is fitting in the Lord." (Colossian 3:18) A godly man is not given to abuse, but rather to praise toward his wife (Proverbs 31:10-12, 28-29). She should embrace the care and protection of her husband.
 - Since our culture doesn't live with extended communal responsibilities, unmarried women, women with no children, empty-nesters, and grandmothers often have the time to study, write, share and teach.

4. 1 Timothy 2:12-13

- **1 Timothy 2:12-13 as it appears in most translations**

I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man but to remain quiet for it was Adam who was first created and then Eve.

- **A Greek-word examination**

Mistranslated words are crossed out, Greek words are in *blue italics*, and *green* words are truer to the Greek meaning:

I do not allow a ~~woman~~ (*gunē*) *wife*
 to ~~teach~~ (*didaskein*) *teach in a continuous, prolonged and uncontrolled way*
 or ~~exercise authority~~ (*authentein*) *over a man to rule or control her husband to the point of murder, holding absolute sway, to the point of killing her husband's God-given position*
 but to ~~remain quiet~~ (*hesuchia*) *be undisturbed and peaceable*
 for it was Adam who was first created and then Eve.

Further explanation of these Greek words:

- The word for *teach* in this verse (*didaskein*) must be translated according to its tense.
- The word for *exercise authority* (*authentein*) is found only once in the New Testament here in this passage. It connotes extreme control. Have you ever known a woman who controlled her husband into oblivion? This should not be happening in the body of Jesus the Messiah. Men should not be controlling their wives into oblivion either, but loving them as Christ loves us. In these passages, Paul was specifically addressing the rising trend of women taking brash and absolute control.

- The word for *remain quiet* (*hesuchia*) doesn't mean quiet at all; neither does it mean that a woman shouldn't speak or teach in a gathering. This beautiful Greek word describes a woman who doesn't interrupt or jump over people's words to speak, but a woman who listens well and is calm and self-contained.

Therefore, a proper paraphrase of 1 Timothy 2:12-13:

Dear Timothy – I, Paul, as your shepherd and loving father in the faith, do not allow a wife to teach in an uncontrolled way that embarrasses her husband and makes him look impotent in his position as the head of his family. As a loving wife, she should never control her husband or insist on getting her way. She should not suffocate him by imitating the evil priestesses who propagated feminine control, public disturbance and immorality in the name of freedom. No, her beauty is found in her love for her husband and her desire to make him “look good in the city gates.” (Proverbs 31:11, 12, 23, 27-31) She is not competing with her husband. Rather, she is his complement, encouragement, and strong support; his rescuer in times of trouble.

Deprived Men

The passages I have examined in this paper have often been interpreted to mean that a man cannot learn from a woman because of her role. However, when a man learns from a woman, neither role is negated. Rather, when men embrace her insights, they better understand the character of God. Let me explain:

The Hebrew word for *compassion* is *racham*. *El Rachum* means *Compassionate God*. *Rechem* means *womb*. The Lord's compassion is like a mother's nurturing love for her child in her womb. Men gain a balanced understanding of the nurturing heart of God when they are open to learn from women who have been anointed with gifts of teaching. Otherwise, women have a greater advantage of learning both the masculine and feminine perspectives from the Word of God, because they learn from both men and women.

In places where men are allowed only to learn from men, the men are deprived of rich perspectives of the nurturing characteristics of God. Following, I give three examples of this wrong thinking in the church:

1. *Example 1:* I heard a prominent Christian pastor and preacher actually say that to listen to a woman teach or to “sit under” her teaching for any length of time would emasculate a man! *Emasculate* means to deprive a man of his male role or identity. A man does not lose his masculinity when he learns from the Spirit of God ministering through a woman. As a fellow heir of grace and co-worker in the Gospel, a women's insights are valuable and equipping to the entire body of Messiah.
2. *Example 2:* Another prominent leader said that “empowering women makes weak men.” Aren't we all filled with the Spirit of power? I have witnessed that the most powerful men are those who possess humility, gentleness and a high value for women. Of the Lord, Isaiah says, “Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.” (Isaiah 40:11)
3. *Example 3:* I visited a church years ago in which the intelligent wife of the pastor was only allowed to teach children. She said that if a male janitor walked into the room while she was teaching, she would stop until he left the room! How sad for the janitor who could have heard the words of Life!

I titled this study *Missing Perspectives* because the insights women bring to the body of Christ do not merely enhance perspective; they fill a void in an otherwise incomplete perspective.

To My Single Sisters

Today, single people comprise almost 50 percent of the church. Having been single until I was 45 years of age, I believe I can address some of the issues that arise for single women in the church.

To my sisters I say – you are one in Messiah Jesus with everyone in the church; you are a fellow heir of the grace of life, a friend, and a co-worker in the Gospel. You are an *ezer* with effective gifts that are inclined toward nurturing, loving greatly, saving, rescuing and protecting.

You do not answer to a pastor, unless you highly respect Him in the Lord. Your Bridegroom is Jesus (John 3:29). Your husband is your Maker (1 Corinthians 11:2), even Abba your Father. Your Guide is the Holy Spirit (John 16:13-15). You listen and submit to the Holy Spirit Who will guide you to leaders you respect to be in authority over you. It is not pride to detect ungodliness in leaders. We should never submit to what is not pure and true. Anointed authority does not come with a church position, but with a humble heart submitted to the Holy Spirit.

In 1 John 2:27, the Apostle John writes, “And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you, but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.”

In the past 40 years of being a Christian, I’ve met men who are absolutely afraid to be without the “covering” of a pastor, and I’ve met women who are absolutely afraid of being without the “covering” of a husband or pastor. Although it is wise to be in community and among those we respect and revere, sometimes we find ourselves in places where this is not possible. Until such a time, I sincerely believe that we can trust that God is Sovereign and that He is our Covering. He gives us what we need in His perfect time if we submit to Him in humility (Psalm 91:1).

Personal Reflections

This study has given me a deeper appreciation for the beauty of God’s order in marriage and in the body of Christ; for the simple beauty of life in Him; and for my need to listen better and well.

I am thankful that I’ve been given the privilege to live the last half of my life with my husband, Dusty. We want what is best for the other. While we often desire the same things, we might have definite opinions and preferences! If Dusty feels strongly about something, I listen! I often heed what he says, knowing that it is God’s plan to direct my life through his guidance and wisdom.

Dusty values my gift of teaching and likes to learn from me as well as other women teachers. I respect his judgment, decision-making, generosity, thoughtfulness, wisdom and diligence. We focus on each other’s strengths and encourage each other through our weaknesses, faults, and idiosyncrasies. The more we value, serve, and praise one another, the easier it is to love in return.

Intention Against Pride and Prejudice

The church is not free from prejudices of many kinds. We must continually guard against pride and selfish ambition. Let us all be intentional to listen to the Spirit of God speaking through our brothers and sisters, young and older, so that we do not miss His words of life coming through “unlikely” people.

Let’s break down the barriers of prejudice and the presuppositions that we impose upon race, gender, age, appearance, or any other difference compared to ourselves. And let’s highly value each other, so that the church is not deprived of nourishing perspectives, but can flourish and function according to God’s design.